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ABSTRACT

As funding for public education decreases, corporations are "making up" the shortfall by donating seemingly benign teaching aides to schools. While many business-school relationships are positive, many others are commercializing classrooms, aiming to make students "brand-loyal" in the guise of providing free equipment, more information, and new interactive curricula. Some students and parents view the increasing commercialization of public education masked as educational curricula as a form of exploitation and created an organization called UNPLUG to demonstrate their opposition to the "corporate buy-out" of public education. This guide for parents provides information on the increasing presence of businesses in the public school system and shows parents how to inform themselves and others about commercialism in school, educate and activate communities about the issue of commercialism, and organize to create commercial-free schools. Part 1, "Background," discusses the defunding of public education, the source of increasing commercialism in schools, sources of educational funding, how businesses can support schools in a nonexploitative manner, and lists concise arguments for and against commercialism in schools. Part 2, "What You Can Do," gives step-by-step suggestions for activities to help parents work effectively against commercialism in schools, including activities to become informed, activate or educate others, organize parents and other citizens, and become effective advocates. The guide concludes with a list of suggestions to create commercial-free schools. An appendix provides a list of organizational resources and sample documents, such as surveys, resolutions, press releases, and policy frameworks for school boards. (KB)

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A Parent Guide to Commercialism in Schools

PS 026003

By Brita Butler-Wall

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Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the work of parents, teachers, students and community members everywhere who are working to keep schools public and advertising-free.

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An Open Letter to Parents

IN NOVEMBER OF 1996, the Seattle school board adopted a policy seeking advertising and corporate sponsorships in our schools as a means of generating funds. A brief public hearing was held an hour before the vote was taken. In spite of eloquent testimony of parents, teachers, young people and other community members, the Board refused to even table the motion.

As a parent of two children in the Seattle Public Schools, I was upset and angry to learn that our school board planned to sell advertising in our schools. I was especially disturbed that parents, students, teachers, and citizens had not been part of the policy-making process.

Our Seattle Council of PTSA was also concerned at the lack of community decision-making in this policy. We solicited many forms of community input. We had email discussions and asked parents to call and email their opinions to the district. A local physician circulated a petition and got over 50 of his colleagues to oppose commercialism in schools.

With the help of THE CENTER, we sponsored a public forum to discuss the issue. We enlisted a diverse group of co-sponsors and attracted 140 participants. We distributed a written survey of those present. Despite overwhelming opposition to the policy, the school board refused to reconsider its position.

We didn't give up. Thanks to the publicity and personal contacts, more organizations got involved in the issue. Some developed position statements; others spread the word to their members and started letter-writing campaigns.

A month later, this new coalition sponsored a second public forum. After this forum, a new grassroots group formed -- the Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools (CCCs). This organization became very active -- writing op-ed pieces, doing radio interviews, making presentations at PTA and community meetings. CCCs members and others testified against commercialism at each monthly school board meeting.

With the help of THE CENTER, our efforts drew national attention -*Education Week, Our Children* (the publication of the National PTA), *The Christian Science Monitor, The New York Times* , the *PBS News Hour* and the ABC television show, *Good Morning, America.*

Six months later, citing public opposition, the Seattle school board rescinded the advertising policy. We succeeded! Today, a coalition of groups is actively working to get rid of *Channel One* and other forms of commercialism in our Seattle schools and to preserve the integrity of the learning environment for our children and young people. We have recently done a Commercialism Walk-Through of 30 schools as a basis for developing a commercialism policy.

By law, our children deserve an education -- not exploitation. Just because advertisers are eager to market their wares to a captive audience doesn't mean we, as parents, need to let them do so. Our children and their education should not be for sale.

Introduction

PARENT INVOLVEMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE! All over the country, parents, students, teachers and other community members are engaged in fighting commercialism in schools and making their schools more democratic in the process:

San Jose, California

San Jose unplugs *Channel One*! After many years of debate and controversy including a legal dispute, *Channel One*'s linchpin in California, Overfelt High School, canceled its contract with the program due to community protests. The victory made the front page of the *San Jose Mercury News* and was covered by *Bloomberg Financial News*.

Gainesville, Florida

Gainesville pulls the plug! After many years of community opposition to *Channel One*, the Alachua County School Board voted unanimously to eliminate the program. The board cited concerns that *Channel One* violates students' constitutional rights; is technologically obsolete; and costs the district much more in lost learning time than the value of the equipment it provides.

Texas

Texas says NO to *Channel One*! Thanks to parent activist Karen Miller who worked tirelessly for three years fighting *Channel One*, the tenth largest school district in Texas, Cypress-Fairbanks, voted not to renew its contract. Inspired by this decision, activists in Houston initiated efforts to remove *Channel One* from their district, the largest in Texas.

Parents should not simply abandon their children to 'experts' to educate. We are partners in our children's education. We need to hold our schools accountable for providing an education that meets the needs of the children, not the needs of 'the bottom line of corporations'. As a parent, you have an important role in making our schools commercial-free zones.

If you have been involved in either opposing commercialism or finding low-cost community solutions that do change education -- let us know! We are collecting photos and examples for our database, quarterly newsletter, and web-site.

This parent guide will show you how to:

- **INFORM** yourself and others about commercialism in your school
- **EDUCATE AND ACTIVATE** your community about the issue of commercialism
- **ORGANIZE** to create commercial-free schools

What do We Mean by Commercialism?

A stack of free book covers distributed by the school counselors to help students meet the school requirement of having book covers on all their books -- advertisements for **McDonald's, Frito-Lay**, and **Nike**.	**ADVERTISING**
A 12-minute television program broadcast to 8 million students at school each day, which includes two minutes of commercials for **M&Ms, Reebok**, the **U.S. Army**, etc.	**CHANNEL ONE**
A school assembly to kick-off a fundraising campaign, at which the principal wraps himself in the **Fund-Wraps** wrapping paper which the students will be asked by the PTA to sell to their family members and neighbors.	**COMMERCIAL FUND-RAISERS**
'Just for Her' product bags distributed to 6th grade girls at a school assembly: a 'Prom Checklist' plus free samples of **Finesse** shampoo, **Secret** deodorant, and **Caress** moisturizing body bar.	**FREEBIES**
A packet sent to teachers from the **Hershey** corporation -- video, lesson plans, and handouts for students showing the role of chocolate in the food pyramid and the biography of Mr. Hershey.	**SPONSORED EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS**

Forms of Commercialism

Consumers Union has categorized types of commercialism in schools as follows:

In-School Ads

Advertisers place ads where students will see them -- on school busses, in the hallways, gym, counseling office, and lunchroom. They show up in lavatories and on book covers. In addition to advertising signs and wall displays, advertisers bring hundreds of thousands of product coupons and samples into the school buildings all over the country. Advertisements for *Salon Selectives* hair products can be found in hallways outside school gyms.

Ads in Classroom Materials and Programs

Advertising signs and logos also show up in classrooms. Television commercials are broadcast daily to over 8 million public school students via the controversial 'news' program called *Channel One*. This programming, with very little breaking news, is a vehicle for two minutes of fast-paced commercials aimed at a captive teen audience. By requiring students to watch ads in school, the school gets the loan of video monitors in each classroom.

Corporate-Sponsored Educational Materials and Programs

Teachers are inundated with free or inexpensive curriculum materials created and distributed by corporations and trade associations. These materials are usually biased and incomplete and often blatantly commercial. They take the form of teacher guides, videotapes, software, books, posters, workbooks, or other teaching aids. Consumers Union lists the Procter & Gamble educational packet, *Decision: Earth*, as 'so blatantly commercial and biased' that attorneys in 11 states were asked to investigate its truthfulness.

Corporate-Sponsored Contests and Incentive Programs

Students and teachers often get the chance win prizes by selling commercial products (as 'fund-raisers') or by entering commercially-sponsored contests. The company gets demographic information for its marketing campaign as well as free exposure in the classroom, during assemblies, and in the school newsletters. Consumers Union discovered that *The Eyes Have It!* poster contest sponsored by Sears Optical required students to go to their local store to submit entries and pick up prizes.

Corporate-Sponsored Teacher Training

Corporations and trade associations sponsor free or low-cost teacher training where teachers are given materials for the year on a subject such as science. Teachers attend summer workshops and receive in-service training that is often biased.

THE CENTER

THERE IS A NATIONAL STANDARD for commercialism in schools. THE CENTER in all of its work is informed by this standard, which was created by a coalition of people at the Milwaukee Conference (see Appendix). THE CENTER can assist you as a community member to counter commercialism in schools. Our Community Assistance Program ("CAT") offers four levels of support:

Direct Education

We widely circulate our materials to grassroots groups and youth media with our toll-free phone number. We provide facts, ideas and action strategies in all our written material. We write only about actions that have already been taken by citizens. This helps make our material both inspirational and useful. In addition, we are able to link citizens, through our national database, with others in their own area who have contacted us on this issue. Finally, we provide citizens with phone assistance on subjects such as how to take a poll, how to figure out what decision-makers to approach, and how to get further support.

Material Assistance

THE CENTER copies court cases, provides studies and fact sheets in areas where people are engaged in discussing commercialism. This enables citizens to have ground to stand on and materials for an educational outreach campaign without finding photocopies or money. In about 40-50 percent of the areas where THE CENTER works, this assistance provides the needed link for students and parents to organize.

Local Coalition Assistance

THE CENTER uses a broad range of grassroots groups and trainers. As much as possible, we try to link groups in the same area, region or state. We ask those groups to send out volunteers or a support person from their own database or network . In this effort, THE CENTER works with a host of groups including the Unitarian Church, the PTA, and the National Education Association.

Direct Assistance

THE CENTER uses the "Family Test," a list of questions to assess the development of an organizing effort in a given community. We feel that in places where we provide technical assistance -- and are investing resources -- we are "training for life." Therefore, we use a mentoring process that enables citizens to train each other. We also ask sites where THE CENTER has given on-site assistance to make their leadership available to help in other locations when the need arises, either by phone or as part of a direct assistance visit.

Part I

Background

This section will give you some background on the general issue of commercialism in schools and also explore the underlying issues:

A. Defunding Public Education

B. The "Money Myth"

C. Lack of Accountability

D. Where Will the Money Come From?

E. Business Support for Schools

F. They Say, We Say: Soundbiting the Arguments

Defunding Public Education

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been a gradual decline in funding for public education. As we reported in our Teachers' Guide, from 1970 to 1990, funding for public education decreased from 7.25 percent to 6.6 percent of the Gross National Product. In some states, school districts are scrambling to pass levies and bonds to pay for the costs that the state allocation doesn't cover. Recently, we have seen spending caps and tax roll-backs such as Proposition 13 in California, Measure 5 in Oregon, and Initiative 601 in the State of Washington.

To make matters worse, the corporate share of taxes is decreasing. Corporations used to pay substantial property taxes that supported public education. Yet according to a study done by the Louisiana Coalition for Tax Justice, the corporate contribution to property taxes that support public schools fell from 44 percent in 1960 to 16 percent in 1990. In fact, corporations are given tax deductions for donating commercial materials to schools.

Along with the trend to defund our schools has been a trend to expect more of the our schools in terms of services for our children and young people. Educators face increasingly challenging populations: non-native speakers of English, homeless families, a widening gap between rich and poor, more single parent families, families with substance abuse, etc. We are a nation that believes in education for all, not just for those whom it is easy to teach.

No longer just an educational institution, our schools now need to be baby-sitters, social service agencies, parks, recreation facilities, and teen hangouts. Many parents, teachers, and students also strongly believe that our schools should provide extracurricular activities such as organized sports, music and art programs, student clubs, etc. We want a safe, productive environment for our children in the late afternoon.

To "make up" for this shortfall, corporations, often encouraged by policy-makers, have been donating seemingly benign teaching aids to schools. Advertisers have been quick to respond to this funding gap and the increasing needs of communities. Sponsors are now offering to pay for cheerleader uniforms, athletic shoes, instrumental band folders and computer software. But these 'gifts' are not truly free. They are part of a national and international marketing strategy to use the school day to increase brand loyalty at younger and younger ages.

Advertisers have begun to saturate our public spaces. Young people already see ads on billboards, television and in magazines. In school, our children can't change the channel, and most can't avoid reading the ads in the halls. School is a place where students spend an estimated 20% of their time, but this time is needed to train minds to think, not to buy.

The "Money Myth"

But How Can We Say No to Money for Schools?

Many parents, as well as school staff, have bought the notion that commercialism is the price we all have to pay in order to have good schools. They believe that advertising will bring in the revenue needed to create and maintain good schools. Feeling the budget crunch, they look to corporate sponsors to help them out.

According to a recent report in *The New York Times*, however, there may be very little gold at the end of the rainbow. In Colorado Springs, District 11 has 33,000 students. In the first two years of soliciting paid advertising in the schools, the district netted only $73,150. The walls and school busses are plastered with advertising posters. In the third year, and by expanding into elementary schools, the advertising program netted only $85,265. That works out to less than $2.60 per student per year. The Colorado district manager of the advertising program says, "It's a drop in the bucket. It allows us -- this doesn't look big -- to buy one more violin or something for a school."

Realistically, at current market rates for advertising in schools, schools will not get revenues significant enough to meet their real needs such as building maintenance, reducing class size, or improving teacher salaries. Parents, teachers, students and community members need to insist that schools focus on first things first -- meeting the basic needs of students. Improved student achievement, improved graduation rates, decrease in violent incidents in school buildings are all important goals. Advertising posing as 'free book covers' and television commercials posing as 'current events' has nothing to do with these goals.

Commercialism in schools is not about bringing in needed money for education. It is about using schools as vehicles to give profit-making companies access to the youth market.

Lack of Accountability

Who is Responsible for All This Commercialism in Our Schools?

Teachers

Public school teachers are keenly aware of the sorry state of many of our schools -- restrooms in disrepair, leaky roofs, lack of supplies, outdated textbooks. They often say, "We'll do anything for the kids..." Many of them do not like accepting materials with corporate logos, but feel they have no choice. Secondary school teachers may be coping with 150 students or more a day, leaving little time to design new, thoroughly-researched, eye-catching materials.

Principals

Many principals manage a large institution with a ridiculously inadequate support system (such as four phone lines for a school of 1000 students). They may feel that monitoring what goes up on the walls is not a high priority. With the trend in some areas toward site-based management, many principals believe they have added responsibilities -- not yet realizing the value of sharing management tasks with a team. In some of our schools, the first impression is one of chaos rather than conscious choice. No wonder that advertisers can walk right in the school door and start posting signs.

Parents

At the secondary level, parents spend less time in schools and may be unaware of the creeping commercialism. Most parents are also unaware of the existence of *Channel One*, the infotainment program, and equally unaware of their right to preview or have their child opt out of watching it. They may hesitate to 'interfere' with the running of the school, fearing to embarrass their child or believing that the school can handle everything.

Although PTA originally formed over 100 years ago as a child advocacy organization, today it often functions as a fund-raiser for the school, paying for playground equipment, science materials, and field trips. With more parents working full-time, parent groups such as PTA have moved away from car washes and spaghetti dinners to commercial fund-raising companies which give them a percentage of the profits -- sometimes as low as 5%.

Students

By eagerly competing for token prizes distributed by the commercial fund-raising companies, our children and young people have become a free sales force to pay for their own education.

Where Will the Money Come From?

IF WE TURN DOWN ADVERTISING DOLLARS, how will we get the money we need for our schools?

Keep the "Public" in Public Education

First, we as parents can do a lot to make education a spending priority. All those hours spent preparing for our school fund-raiser could be spent lobbying the legislators to really invest in children and young people. In Washington state, only 40 PTA leaders from Seattle showed up in Olympia to urge legislators to establish better school funding in 1997. This was a record turn-out of parents, from a city of nearly a million.

Needs and Wants

Second, teachers and school administrators need to distinguish between needs and wants. While it may be nice to have a splashy, colorful poster of the food pyramid, is it worth putting up the biased version offered by Hershey's or the Beef Council? Sometimes these teaching aids may be available from not-for-profit organizations and agencies, without a logo. Teachers always have a noncommercial option to any visuals -- they can assign the students to research and make the poster or instructional materials. Students can be taught to make book-covers out of recycled materials and decorate them with their own artwork.

Just Ask

Third, many schools have assumed there is no money available. Just because the majority of voters in an area voted down a levy doesn't mean that a sizable number of parents and other community members wouldn't be willing to make a direct donation to a school. Depending on the affluence of the community, some PTAs raise their entire annual budget just by asking for donations. They often use a large part of these funds to make grants to teachers. Local businesses can and do make philanthropic donations, without logos attached.

Waste Not, Want Not

Finally, we parents can hold our schools accountable. Too many times the sheer size of the school contributes to the 'not my responsibility' attitude. We parents who must balance a family budget every month have little sympathy when school administrators run out of paper in March. Obviously, many efficiency measures result in only a small savings, but they do add up. More importantly, an efficiently managed school sends a strong signal to would-be contributors that our contributions will be wisely spent.

Business Support for Schools

BUSINESS HAS A LOT TO GAIN from world-class schools. If our public schools graduate students who can read, write, figure, and think, the business world will gain valuable employees and will spend less on basic training of new employees. In order to be competitive in a world economy, business needs savvy, creative, and highly-skilled workers. We all need to be engaged in the partnership of learning.

How Can Businesses Support Schools?

We can find and emulate models of healthy business/school partnerships. A local business is a part of the community around our schools, and there can be a productive, two-way relationship between our schools and our local businesses:

- **Corporate Philanthropy**
- **Mentoring**
- **On-site Field Trips**
- **Scholarships**
- **Summer Internships for Students**
- **Tutoring**

More importantly, businesses can provide flex-time for employees to meet with their children's teachers and paid leave for parents to tend to sick children. The U.S. Department of Education recommends that businesses promise to help their employees become more involved in their children's education (see Appendix).

Setting Community Standards

There are many healthy school/business partnerships. However, the mission of a school and the mission of a corporation are fundamentally different. It is important that all the stakeholders in education establish standards for their community about the type and amount of commercialism they will accept in their public schools.

They Say, We Say
Sound-biting the arguments

THEY SAY:

- Children and young people are walking billboards -- they wear clothes with logos all over them!
- Children and young people are surrounded by ads anyway -- on billboards, on television at home.
- Commercialism is not a priority -- our school has more pressing problems.
- Our schools need money -- and businesses just want to help!
- Children and young people need after-school activities -- and that costs money.
- Children and young people of today are too sophisticated to believe what ads tell them.
- Ads in school give teachers an opportunity to teach media literacy.
- Ads provide good product information for children and young people about what to buy.
- A logo is not an ad; it just identifies the company.
- It's only fair to acknowledge corporate generosity to schools.

WE SAY:

- Studies have shown that ads in school are taken as school endorsement. What people choose to wear does not imply an endorsement by the school.
- School advertising is different and schools should be a refuge from ads!
- The school funding crisis is how commercialism crept in. Also, ads sabotage critical thinking...and learning to think IS education.
- If businesses paid more taxes, schools would not be underfunded.
- Other local agencies and non-profit organizations can provide those activities.
- If ads don't work, why do companies spend billions trying to reach teens?
- We don't let people sell drugs at school in order to teach children and young people about drugs.
- Ads present only one side of the story, and appeal to the emotions vs. the intellect.
- Logos create brand identification, build brand loyalty, and draw attention.
- A real gift requires nothing in return...such as requiring students to see a logo.

Part II

What You Can Do

MANY SCHOOLS ARE RAPIDLY LOSING SIGHT of their educational mission and becoming hunting grounds for corporations stalking our children and young people. But is this an inevitable outcome? Or is there something that we as parents, teachers, and students can do about it?

This section is intended to give you step-by-step, practical suggestions for activities to help you work effectively against commercialism in schools:

A. Inform

B. Activate/Educate

C. Organize

D. Become an Effective Advocate

Inform

IT'S IMPORTANT TO START BY informing yourself as much as you can about commercialism in schools. What are the relevant policies and laws? How much commercialism is already present in your school? Below you'll find concrete, practical, proven suggestions for assessing the current situation.

We've marked advanced activities with a √ .

STEP ONE: ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION

All of the activities below are better done as a group, broken up so that each person can make 3-5 phone calls, rather than having one person take on all the work. Students and teachers are important allies as are any of the people listed in our "Stakeholders in Education" list (see Appendix). The earlier you bring someone into the process, the more they will have invested in following through its outcome. So even though it seems early, it is important that you become a local expert on commercialism WITH others. It also saves you time in the long run because if you are the only expert, you will have to educate other people and bring them up to speed.

ACTIVITY: Send Out Feelers

The key to success in any information/education/organization activity is to build a group. So make your first call/door knock to other parents and neighbors to see if they have heard about this issue and want to look into it as well. How do people feel about the issue?

TIPS:

Spread the News: Copy one of the articles on commercialism and pass it around with a note saying, "Is this happening in our schools?"

Phone Interview: Call some key constituents and interview them about the issue.

Send Out a Query: Write an article for the local/school paper with a phone number to call if anyone is interested. Send out a query on email to see who else is interested in the issue.

STEP TWO: RESEARCH THE ISSUE

Join THE CENTER to get our quarterly newsletter with up-to-date information about how communities all over the country are making their schools commercial-free. Use the resource list in this guide and read all you can about commercialism. If you have Internet access, you can also visit Internet web sites. If you don't, check with your library for resources. Commercialism has been widely covered in the media. Join THE CENTER's free email discussion list to find out how other parents, teachers, and students are handling this issue (see Resources).

Call us at The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education for answers to your specific questions (1-800-UNPLUG-1). We can put you in touch with other parents, teachers, and students who have successfully fought commercialism in their schools.

ACTIVITY: Commercialism Walk-Through

Get a few parents and students together to conduct a "Walk-Through" of some of your schools. Use the Commercialism Walk-Through Survey available from THE CENTER. A lot of information can be gathered in only two to four hours.

TIPS:

Use a Team: Invite the principal, a teacher, student body leader, PTA leader, and community member to join you. Invite the local news media and the student newspaper to send a reporter.

Take Pictures: Take photographs or videos. You may need permission to film students.

Collect Artifacts: Ask for samples of book covers, freebies, or even posters and fundraising flyers.

ACTIVITY: Research School Policies

At the school building level, ask your principal for a copy of the school's written policies on commercialism and fundraising (hint: many schools and districts have no written policy). Ask your PTA president for a copy of the PTA fund-raising policy as well. Find out what curriculum in media literacy is offered, whether or not it is required, and at what grade levels.

Call your local school district's public relations office, or the office of the local superintendent and the local teachers' association. Ask to have copies of their written policies regarding advertising, fund-raising, and sponsored materials.

Find out what policies and resolutions already exist at the state level. Call your Superintendent of Public Instruction, the state Board of Education, or the state teachers' union office. Some of this information may also be available in the library or on the Internet. (For information about policies and positions of national groups, contact the groups listed in the Appendix.)

Public participation is the exception, not the norm, in our public schools. You may encounter some resistance, but the best defense is a good offense. You are a part of your public school and your right to assert yourself into the public process is an important one to exercise.

TIPS:

Be Prepared: Walk in knowing the person you are meeting and who they listen to. If possible, have that person at your side. Make sure the person you are seeing knows ahead of time why you are there; send a reminder note or email.

Stick to the Issue: Walk in non-defensively, and with specific goals. Don't get sidetracked with other topics.

Be Professional: Walk in as the representative of a credible group. Be punctual and be sure to leave on time; schedule a follow-up appointment if necessary.

√ ACTIVITY: Research Public Opinion

Try to get a sense of where your school community stands on this issue, and how much information they already have.

You can administer a survey on commercialism at your next PTA and community meetings (see Appendix for sample). If you have set up an email list of parents at your school, send out a query to them on email.

Talk to all your stakeholders (see Appendix). Phone your principal, teachers, district staff and get their opinions as well.

√ ACTIVITY: Research Current School Funding

Call your school district budget or business office and get current facts and figures about how much money is available and where it goes. Talk to any school or district-wide fundraising groups to get the same information. Get general information on funding and education from educational publications such as *Education Week*, or the *Phi Delta Kappan* (see Resources).

√ ACTIVITY: Research State and Local Laws

Call the office of your local legislator and get copies of any relevant legislation on commercialism in schools. Your state may prohibit ads on school busses, or advertisements for cigarettes or alcohol near the schools. Contact THE CENTER for information on case law related to *Channel One* and commercialism, and how to contact the lawyers involved.

Activate/Educate

Why Should We Try to Educate Others?

As you learn more about the issue and about commercialism in your school, let others know. This is a good way to begin to build coalitions with others who care about our schools. Think about each of the 'stakeholders' in education and how best to reach them (see Appendix). Many times other parents, teachers, principals, students, and even school board members are not well-informed. You will be doing them a favor!

But What if Other People Just Don't Care?

Many parents, students, and even school staff are overwhelmed by the size and bureaucracy of the school system. They may believe it is impossible to make any meaningful change. They may have skills and resources to contribute, but if they believe the situation is hopeless, they won't do a thing. They need to see results. If you start small and people can see the difference, they'll want to join you.

Advanced activities are marked with a √ .

STEP ONE: SHARE INFORMATION

ACTIVITY: Door-Knocking

Get on the phone or go visit your neighbors when you drop off your children to play. Talk to other parents in your carpool or at softball or soccer practice. Talk to your day-care provider, and to parents of pre-schoolers at the playground. Talk to your children's grandparents at family gatherings. Remember that education is everybody's business!

TIPS:

Try Everyone: You may be surprised to find who is interested in this issue. Don't forget to talk to your pediatrician, grocery clerk, and piano teacher.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you know a specific person I should speak to there?"

ACTIVITY: Mailing Information Packets

You can prepare folders with current information on commercialism -- include background information such as *Captive Kids*, as well as recent press clippings, your fact sheet, quotes from your surveys, and a resource list.

Offer to send this information to your principal, lead teachers, student body leaders, school board members, superintendent, and heads of local organizations interested in young people and/or education issues.

ACTIVITY: Follow Up Phone Call/Fax

Be sure to follow-up your mailing with a phone call or by asking for an in-person meeting. Be friendly and persistent. Remember not to take 'no' for an answer until the third time! Most people need a little prodding because of their busy schedules, but persistence with a good attitude usually gets results.

√ ACTIVITY: Write for Newspaper/Newsletter

Many parents rely on the school or PTA newsletter as their main source of information about the school. You can write an article, book review, opinion piece, or letter to the editor. If you are planning an event, ask the newsletter editor to include an announcement and a follow-up story.

Consider writing a similar piece for the Teachers' Union newsletter, the district newsletter, and the local newspaper. Don't forget the neighborhood paper as well as the dailies. Be sure to include your full name, address and phone number.

EXAMPLES: Local Types of Coverage on Commercialism

EastSide Parent, monthly parenting newspaper

Inside School Stories, Washington Middle School student newsletter

Puget Sound Business Journal, monthly regional newspaper

The Flash! Region VI PTA newsletter

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, daily newspaper

The Seattle Weekly, urban weekly newspaper

The Source, monthly newspaper of the Church Council of Greater Seattle

The Stranger, urban weekly newspaper

The Urban Experience, high school all-city newspaper

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STEP TWO: EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

You can distribute a lot of information at an educational event such as a school assembly, workshop, or public forum. You can ask to put up a resource table at a regularly-scheduled event such as a PTA meeting or annual school concert. You can offer to give a workshop or presentation on commercialism at a conference or professional meeting. You may be able to get the Associated Student Body (ASB) or the PTA to co-sponsor an educational event.

ACTIVITY: Tabling

Set up a table at your next PTA meeting, or out in the hall before the Spring Concert or Open House. You can distribute materials, answer questions, and collect the names of people interested in this issue. You can also ask for permission to table at school during the lunch period or to set up a non-staffed table in the teachers' lounge.

TIPS:

Location, Location, Location: Try for a high-traffic area without disrupting the event itself. You may want two tables, one on each side of the hall.

Customize Your Literature: Summarize what you have learned in a fact sheet (one-two pages). Keep it brief and accurate, and pay attention to layout.

Work as a Team: Bring along another parent for moral support and to help answer questions. Aim for diversity -- age, gender, ethnicity.

Use a Visual: Set up an eye-catching tri-fold display, or show a clip from a video to draw people in. Post a large banner or sign over your table to identify your issue.

Make Contact: Don't wait for passers-by to come to you -- ask what they think of commercialism, or if they have seen *Channel One* themselves.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you have a specific person I should speak to there?"

ACTIVITY: Distribute a Survey

You can design a brief survey to distribute at events, or even through your PTA newsletter. Regardless of the return rate, this is an excellent way to get people thinking and talking about the issue. You will get great quotes and may be able to write up your results in a report for the policy-makers and/or news media. Designing a valid and reliable survey takes expertise, but you can ask two or three simple, open-ended questions to get a feel for people's opinions (see sample in Appendix).

TIPS:

Keep it Brief: A couple of open-ended questions with plenty of space to write will yield lots of valuable information about people's concerns.

Make Name Optional: Include a space for name, address, phone and email for those who want more information.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you have a specific person I should speak to there?"

√ ACTIVITY: Give a Presentation

Develop an oral presentation which you can offer to give at a PTA meeting, a site council or staff meeting, or a community meeting. You could inquire about giving your presentation at a school board meeting, or at the district teachers' union meeting.

TIPS:

Be Realistic: Most groups have a full agenda. Ask for a reasonable amount of time (10-20 minutes). Find out what the attendance will be.

Plan Ahead: Call to confirm the day before the presentation. Arrive ahead of time to set up your materials. Arrange for an overhead projector or VCR if you need one.

Bring Materials: Bring enough handouts to distribute. If possible, bring commercialism 'artifacts' for show and tell at the beginning of your presentation.

Follow Through: Collect names of those interested in more information. Ask for suggestions of other groups you should be contacting and/or making presentations to. Call to thank the group leader and offer to send more information for their newsletter or next meeting.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you have a specific person I should speak to there?"

STEP THREE: MEET WITH KEY PEOPLE

ACTIVITY: Drop By Personal Meeting

Often, the simplest way to reach teachers, administrators and policy-makers is to simply drop by their office with an information packet. Be sure to leave information about how they can reach you.

√ *ACTIVITY: Meet with a Decision Maker/Key Constituent*

One of the most effective ways of sharing what you have learned is by meetings in groups with key decision makers. Ask for an appointment with your school principal and/or school board members. Offer to send them results of any surveys you have conducted.

TIPS:

Go in a Group: Bring along representatives from the groups in your coalition. Bring teachers and students whenever possible, as well as parents and citizens.

Start the Meeting Out Personally: Introduce yourself, show that you know something positive that this decision maker has done, and thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

Two-Way Communication: Explain your concerns and listen to their views. Offer to send to send information.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you know a specific person I should speak to there?"

√ ACTIVITY: Hold a Town Meeting

When something is timely and urgent and there has been some activity and organizing around the issue, you may want to hold a town meeting. The purpose of a town meeting is to hold accountable those in charge OR to create a strong public voice that asks for a specific remedy. At a town meeting, people will appreciate hearing from both sides of the issue so that they can form their own opinions.

TIPS:

Timing is Crucial: Get your announcements out early and often. Try to let parents, teachers, and students know about the event at least three times. Be sure to avoid conflicts with religious holidays and other school or community events.

Make it Comfortable: Provide free child-care, use name tags, and offer simple refreshments.

Choose a Good Location: Find a place people like. A school building may not be comfortable for some parents and community members. Consider using a community center, public library, or church meeting room.

Involve Co-Sponsors: Ask other organizations to co-sponsor the event with you. They can help cover costs and can publicize the event through their own channels.

Get Good Speakers: Call THE CENTER for suggestions of speakers in your area who are knowledgeable about the issue. Allow plenty of time for participants to ask questions and express their views.

Give People Something to Take Home: Be sure to provide a resource table and distribute current information. Collect names of those interested in the issue.

Build a Coalition: Whether someone says they are interested or not, ask them, "What group do you know that I should contact about this? Do you have a specific person I should speak to there?"

Organize

The first step in making sure our schools reflect our community goals is to put the public back into public policy development, including school policy. We, as parents, as well as other citizens, teachers, and students, have a right and an obligation to give our input into these decisions, preferably at the initial stages rather than at a token last-minute 'hearing'. It is important that all constituents have a voice in education. Building a coalition and organizing is crucial to achieving your goals.

STEP ONE: REACH OUT

Reach out to as many groups as possible. The more diverse your coalition, the stronger your voice. Be creative in reaching out to groups you haven't yet worked with, including youth groups.

TIPS:

Seek Diversity: Make a conscious effort to include senior citizen groups, ethnic groups, youth groups, and nontraditional family groups.

Be Persistent: Call at least three times. Offer to send information or bring it in person. Offer to write an article for their next newsletter.

Give Credit: Make sure to include your coalition partners in news interviews, and list them on your printed materials and news releases.

ACTIVITY: Reach the Inner Circle

Start by contacting groups who are already working on children/education issues such as media literacy groups and the PTA. These groups can put you in touch with similar groups.

ACTIVITY: Reach the Outer Circle

Expand your circle of influence to include other groups which the stakeholders belong to. This could include professional associations of teachers or principals, local youth groups, alumni groups, parent booster clubs, and the local neighborhood or community association.

ACTIVITY: Reach the Expanding Circle

Widen your outreach to include other groups in the community who are involved in even one aspect of this issue. Environmental groups are concerned about how corporations are slanting curricular materials. Religious groups may be concerned about the integrity of the classroom and the analogy to the separation of church and state. Health care providers and nutritionists may be concerned about advertising messages sabotaging their efforts to help children and youth make healthy choices. Women's groups may be concerned with the image of girls portrayed by advertisers on *Channel One*.

√ ACTIVITY: Get Business to Sign On

Meet with local businesses and get them to take a pledge not to advertise in schools. You can ask them to endorse the Milwaukee Principles (see Appendix). Representatives from THE CENTER met recently with Vice Presidents of Levi Strauss and convinced their company to pull their advertising on *Channel One*. Businesses who develop ethical practices can serve as a model for others.

√ ACTIVITY: Educate Other Schools and Districts

Get in touch with parents, teachers, and citizens throughout your school district and in your region. You can share experiences and tips which will help each other. THE CENTER can help you contact others in your area. Remember, advertisers work globally.

STEP TWO: BUILD A COALITION

As a parent, you may already be part of organizations interested in the welfare of all children and young people-- your local PTA, your school's advisory council, or other local groups. Your group can form a coalition with other groups concerned about education and children. Leveraging the power of other groups will multiply the effect of your efforts on any issue.

ACTIVITY: Take a Stand

Ask your coalition partners to pass a resolution about commercialism in schools (see Appendix). Form a delegation to meet with key decision-makers to discuss the resolution.

ACTIVITY: Activate Members

Ask your coalition partners to educate their own membership, through their newsletter, or at a regular meeting. Ask them to start a letter-writing campaign at their next get-together. Ask your coalition partners to find individuals and groups who might be interested in the issue. You can expand your mailing list and recruit volunteers.

√ *ACTIVITY: Help Educate the public*

Ask your coalition partners to use the news media or sponsor forums and workshops for the public.

EXAMPLES: Coalition Partners

Many groups in Seattle are interested in issues of parent involvement, democracy, and commercialism in schools:

American Association of University Women
Fast Forward Media Lab
King County Labor Coalition
Seattle Council of PTSAs
The Church Council of Greater Seattle
The League of Women Voters
The Seattle Greens
The Seattle Young People's Project
U.S. Postal Workers' Union
Washington Campaign for Democracy

STEP THREE: INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION

You may need to develop a media strategy to help bring the issue into the awareness of the general public, and enlist their help in persuading policy-makers that concerns about commercialism are important.

In a rural area or small town, word of mouth may be your most effective tool. In larger cities, you will need to learn to deal with the news media. This involves developing relationships with producers, editors and reporters, as well as publicizing events.

ACTIVITY: Invite the News Media

Be sure to invite news media to your events and important activities. Developing a good relationship with reporters and editors involves being reliable and forthcoming. Let them know they can trust you to give them important information. Offer to fax additional background information on the issue.

TIPS:

Send a news release: Mail or fax a press release two to four days before your event to radio, television, and daily papers (see sample in Appendix).

Follow-Up: Press releases are often misplaced so be sure to follow-up with a phone call the day before the event.

Photo-Op: Be sure to mention that there will be photo opportunities at your event.

Be Professional: Treat the news media courteously. Answer phone calls promptly, and give accurate information. Give them a call when something comes up which they may be interested in covering. Most editors and reporters want to produce fair coverage of the issue, and will appreciate your help.

ACTIVITY: Make the News Media Feel Welcome

Make it easy for reporters to cover your event thoroughly. Give them the tools they need to do a good job, and they'll appreciate it.

TIPS:

Set Up a Press Table: At the event itself, put a press table at the entry. Ask news media to sign-in, give them each a press packet, and introduce them to your spokespeople.

Be Available: Make sure your group's contact person is available for phone interviews the day before and day after the event.

Create a Press Packet: Include your press release, information about your organization, your fact sheet about commercialism, photocopies of other news stories and editorials, names and phone numbers of your spokespeople and any other information which reporters may find helpful.

ACTIVITY: Give Media Interviews

Identify several people willing to be spokespeople for your group or coalition on this issue. Be sure to include a variety of people, including young people. Your press release can refer to these people, and you can provide a list of their names and phone numbers in your press packet.

√ ACTIVITY: Meet with Editorial Boards

You can also set up a meeting between members of your group and the editorial board of your local newspaper. Bring relevant materials, give a brief presentation, and be prepared to answer questions. Such a meeting can give them valuable background and help them sort out the underlying issues.

TIPS:

Interview the Interviewer: When a reporter calls, find out what sort of coverage they are giving the issue, what information they already know, and what their bias is.

Control the Interview: Set the conditions for the interview -- how much time you have, or a more convenient time to talk. You can do radio interviews by phone, or at home. If TV reporters come to your house, let them know what they may and may not photograph.

Know your message: Figure out what you really want to say -- just two or three points -- and make sure to get these points across during the interview, regardless of the questions asked. Give vivid, specific examples and use words to 'paint a picture'.

Stay alert: Assume that everything you say is 'on the record', and be careful in your choice of words. Don't let yourself get drawn into criticism of other people -- stick to the issues.

√ ACTIVITY: Hold a News Conference

You may even want to call a news (press) conference in releasing a report or when several people want to comment on a new development. Choose an appropriate location which is convenient to the news media and which has good visual potential. For example, you might stand outside an elementary school. Bring press packets, and even copies of any speeches which will be made. Have only a couple of speakers, but bring others along to show solidarity with your concerns.

STEP FOUR: TAKE ACTION

Time spent in planning will make your actions more strategic, and more effective. An advocacy group is more than a loose conglomeration of inspired individuals -- it carries the force of a tightly-knit, purposeful community.

TIPS:

Set Goals: When your group has agreed on a vision and mission, you can brainstorm your goals, and decide on the 3-4 most important ones. Writing down your goals will help you stay focused and will make decision-making much easier.

Decide on objectives: In order to reach your goals, your group will want to set some specific objectives. These should be feasible, logical, and measurable steps toward achieving the goal. In other words, you should be able to know when you have achieved your objective.

Choose a strategy: Organized groups have been successful using several different strategies to fight commercialism around the country: political, legal, and legislative. Decide what will work best for your group.

ACTIVITY: Get a Local Policy Passed

It's possible that there is no policy governing advertising or other forms of commercialism in your schools. You can work with coalition partners to draft a policy which is based on research and which reflects community standards. Be sure to address the issue of media literacy education.

Most school boards are elected officials. They generally come from a variety of walks of life, but are not necessarily professional educators. You may very well know much more about the issue of commercialism in schools than they do. If your school board members are not responsive to the public, you can seek out and campaign for candidates who are.

TIPS:

Become Acquainted: Get to know your local school board member. Make sure that the issue of commercialism gets raised in any town meetings or events which the school board member attends.

Enlist Others: It is important to show that many people share your concerns about the issue and about public process. Ask friends and neighbors to phone or email your school board members.

Speak Out: Enlist concerned parents, teachers, and students to attend a school board meeting. Often these meetings have a period of public comment. Write out your speech and practice it if necessary. Time yourself so your most important point doesn't get cut off. Bring along friends or family members for moral support. Provide written copies of your speech to the school board members for their ready reference.

Be Visible and Accessible: If the meeting is covered by the news media, they are likely to photograph any signs you bring, and interview you before or after the meeting.

√ *ACTIVITY: Lawsuit*

All across the country, parents, teachers, and community members have filed lawsuits against *Channel One*.

For a recent state conference on school law, Seattle attorney Mike Hoge researched the legal aspects of commercialism and concluded that school boards have the authority to solicit, permit, or ban advertising and other forms of commercialism, unless they violate state or constitutional law in doing so (See Appendix for sample policy framework). He recommends that school boards adopt a policy on commercialism to protect themselves from lawsuits. Many states have signed on to the Milwaukee Principles in absence of local policies.

√ *ACTIVITY: Pass Legislation*

Some states, including New York, have managed to outlaw *Channel One*. California legislators decided that *Channel One* would be allowed, but that schools must allow students to 'opt out' of watching it (see sample bill in Appendix). Others, such as Washington State, have outlawed advertising on school busses on the grounds that it might pose a threat to student safety.

STEP FIVE: GET INVOLVED NATIONALLY

Commercialism is not just an issue in your school or in your district. Although ads tend to creep into schools in low-income areas first, even relatively wealthy districts are now being approached by advertisers. Your struggles and successes can help and inspire others around the country who are working to preserve the integrity of their schools.

You can volunteer to go to other regions for THE CENTER and share your experiences. Depending on your time and availability, there are several roles you can take:

- **Board member**
- **Organizer of other communities**
- **Spokesperson**
- **Trainer**
- **Writer of op-ed pieces**

Recipes for Success

PARENTS ARE BUSY PEOPLE and you may not believe you have the time to work for change. You might be surprised at what you can accomplish with just a few minutes of your time:

Estimated Time	What you can do
1 min.	Leave a phone message
5 min.	Make a phone call
5 min.	Write a postcard
10 min.	Send an email message to all the people in your community who have email
15 min.	Send a brief email message to your superintendent and school board
30 min.	Write a letter to the editor of local paper or PTA newsletter
30 min.	Write a press release
60 min.	Fax a press release to local media outlets
60 min.	Give a presentation at a PTA or staff meeting
60 min.	Go to your child's school, meet with the principal for 15 min., and return home
90 min.	Do a Commercialism Walk-Through of your school with 3 other people

Become an Effective Advocate

EDUCATORS DON'T ALWAYS TAKE PARENTS SERIOUSLY. For many school and district staff, local PTAs are seen as the 'ladies auxiliary' of the school, rather than an issues-oriented advocacy organization. You can't change that perception overnight, or on one issue, but you can make a dent. Your job is to convey how serious you are -- by being well-informed, credible, and prepared to hold them accountable -- without being confrontational.

Communicate in Their Language

Learn the Jargon: One reason that parents are sometimes treated as an afterthought in educational decision-making is that they don't know how the school system works, and don't have enough background information on education issues. With a little homework, and by networking with other parents, teachers, and students, you can easily remedy that situation. It pays to learn the buzzwords used in your district, and find out what they really mean. What are 'partnership opportunities', 'corporate sponsorships', and 'teacher incentives', anyway?

Be Specific: In your communications with the policy-makers and public, you can define your terms and cite facts and figures to make it clear that you know what you are talking about. Unsupported opinions don't carry much weight. As a parent, you have the advantage of being able to bring fresh, vivid examples as you tell your own story.

TIPS:

Get Oriented: Interview key people or the education reporter at a local newspaper and ask them to 'lay out the field'.

Get the Big Picture: Attend meetings and ask people who are active citizens to have coffee with you. Ask them for help in building a list of stakeholders and key decision-makers for your district (see Appendix).

Find an Ally: Find the representative to the school board from the teachers' union, PTA, student group, or student newspaper. Find a sympathetic school board member who can help interpret the situation for you.

How Can My Group Build Credibility?

Check Reality: Find out what the formal and informal decision-making structures are. Know who the key players are and whose opinions they respect. It is very helpful to find an ally already in the system who can help clarify how things are really done. On paper, the site council or other shared decision-making body may have a lot of power -- in reality, the football coach may have the most influence at the school.

Follow Protocol: Schools are bureaucracies. Learn what avenues are available to you and use them. Your district may already have guidelines about students' rights and responsibilities. As a parent, learn the chain of command for voicing your concerns in the school system, and use it.

Take the High Road: If you refuse to discuss personalities, but stick to the issues, your opinions will be respected. If you admit the possibility of error, if you respect others' positions (especially those unlike yours), you will come out ahead in the long run. It is critical to not demonize the opposition -- even the corporations.

Remain Courteous: Keep your word. Ask people what they think. Return phone calls. Thank people. Things which you already do naturally in your social circle are important in creating a democratic school or a community that is responsive.

TIPS:

Get a Reference: Ask the question, "May I use your name?" or "Would you be willing to call and introduce me?"

Get Endorsements: Early on, get a list of people who are 'signed on' to your issue, whether citizens or key decision makers.

Conclusion: Creating Commercial-Free Schools

IT IS POSSIBLE for a school to be noncommercial. It is crucial for a school to be noncommercial -- what is at stake is our children's education.

If public schools are not for the good of children, but for the good of business, our children face a bleak future. Where else can we send them to get an education and trust that their caretakers will work in their best interests? Some parents will send their children to private schools for just this reason. Many more cannot afford this option.

There may be children whose parents counteract commercial messages at home and who try to inoculate their children against propaganda. However, there are also millions of children whose families are not teaching them to read between the lines of the messages which bombard them daily.

How can a school be noncommercial in these lean times? Here are a few suggestions:

Let Students Create

Students themselves can create art for their school walls, design their own book covers made from recycled materials, and even research their own current events programs. In fact, students benefit from the process of generating their own educational materials.

Use Volunteers

Senior citizen, parent, and college student volunteers can help school staff with tutoring, mentoring and other tasks. Parents can search the Internet or the library for current curriculum information to pass on to the teacher.

Recycle

Teachers can erase slanted corporate-sponsored software and use free disks as blank disks for word processing. Students can recycle grocery bags for book covers.

Get Donations

Parents and community members can provide extra supplies and equipment -- from band folders to mouse pads -- without logos. Parents can ask their own employer to make a donation to the schools, again, without any logos attached.

Reduce Junkmail

Parents can volunteer to write to the companies which send junkmail to school staff and request that their names be deleted from future mailings as well as from shared mailing lists.

Manage Time

Principals can reduce time spent with company representatives hawking their wares and reduce time spent sorting junkmail that enters the school building.

Shed Light on the Issues

Parents can encourage students to relate their experiences. Parents can open up the schools to public scrutiny -- invite the news media and the legislators to see the buckets in the hall to catch rain from the leaky roofs. Invite them to read the 30 year old out-of-date textbooks. Parents and students can tell the story of their school as no-one else can.

Good schools focus on teaching and learning. Good schools meet students' real needs. Good schools put students first.

We are all accountable for creating and maintaining good schools. Lost in all this buying and selling is the mission of our schools -- to prepare our future workforce with the knowledge and skills they will need all their lives and, most importantly, to prepare our citizenry with the critical thinking they will need to participate in our democracy.

Part III

Appendix

This section is intended to give you resources and sample documents that you can use as models for your own organizing:

A. Milwaukee Principles

B. "Employers for Learning" Promise

C. Stakeholders in Education

D. Positions of National Organizations

E. Sample Survey

F. Sample Resolution

G. Sample Press Release

H. Sample Policy Framework for School Boards

MILWAUKEE PRINCIPLES

MILWAUKEE PRINCIPLES FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS (1990)

School-business relationships based on sound principles can contribute to high quality education. however, compulsory attendance confers on educators an obligation to protect the welfare of their students and the integrity of the learning environment. Therefore, when working together, schools and businesses must ensure that educational values are not distorted in the process. Positive school-business relationships should be ethical and structured in accordance with all eight of the following principles:

1. Corporate involvement shall not require students to observe, listen to, or read commercial advertising.

2. Selling or providing access to a captive audience in the classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust.

3. Since school property and time are publicly funded, selling or providing free access to advertising on school property outside the classroom involves ethical and legal issues that must be addressed.

4. Corporate involvement must support the goals and objectives of the schools. Curriculum and instruction are within the purview of educators.

5. Programs of corporate involvement must be structured to meet an identified education need, not a commercial motive, and must be evaluated for educational effectiveness by the school/district on an ongoing basis.

6. Schools and educators should hold sponsored and donated materials to the same standard used for the selection and purchase of curriculum materials.

7. Corporate involvement programs should not limit the discretion of schools and teachers in the use of sponsored materials.

8. Sponsor recognition and corporate logos should be for identification rather than commercial purposes.

PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education

Join the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education...

Employers for Learning Promise

A strong and vigorous economy, for our employers and our nation, depends upon an educated, skilled, and competent citizenry. Today's students are tomorrow's citizens, and are our long-term investments for the future.

Employers play an important role in the school-improvement efforts on local, state, and national levels. We can now multiply the effectiveness of such efforts by enlisting our current employees as partners in the campaign to support and better the American educational system. Any company, regardless of its size, can take steps to support parents in its workforce and to support local education.

Over 30 years of research shows that greater family and adult involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education.

Small investments that enable employee participation in students' academic success, and in our education system, lead to a win/win for everyone:

- ***Employees Win*** by helping prepare a highly skilled and globally competitive workforce.
- ***Employees Win*** by making positive differences in children's education and in their local schools.
- ***Schools Win*** from increased parental and community involvement.
- ***Students Win*** from better education.

We recognize there are many ways to get started:

- Contact a local school to discuss opportunities for cooperation.
- Explore with employees ways in which they can help children learn.
- Explore with employees ways in which they can help local schools better educate their students.
- Explore policies and practices to encourage and enable employee involvement in schools and learning.
- Contact the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education for information.

We commit to:

- Identify a contact person, authorized to explore and develop options for company involvement in our family-school-community initiatives.
- Take action to implement programs.
- Share best practices after evaluating programs annually.
- Form partnerships with other stakeholders to promote, implement, and improve family-friendly policies and practices.

We would like to become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. We commit our organization to family-friendly practices and will work with others to form partnerships that support children's learning. (Please type or print the following information.)

President/CEO: _____ **Signature:** _____

Company/Organization: _____ **Date:** _____

Contact Person: _____ **Title:** _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____ **Fax:** _____ **E-Mail:** _____

Send to: Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-8173 or fax to 202-401-3036 to receive your **Employers for Learning Promise Certificate.**

STAKEHOLDERS IN EDUCATION

THESE ARE THE PEOPLE who are stakeholders in education. Take the trouble to learn their names and phone numbers. Each of them sees education from a different, and valuable, perspective. Be sure to include them in your efforts to work toward better schools.

	Phone	Email

ADMINISTRATORS
- Principal
- Superintendent

COMMUNITY
- Business Partner Liaison
- Citizen Group Leader
- Local Education Editor/Reporter
- Neighborhood Ass'n. President
- Social Service Agency Liaison

PARENTS
- PTA Legislative Chair
- PTA Local Unit President
- PTA Newsletter Editor
- Site Council Chair

POLICY MAKERS
- City Council Member
- School Board Director

SCHOOL STAFF
- Head Counselor
- Head Custodian
- Head Librarian
- Head Secretary

STUDENTS
- Student Body (ASB) President
- Student Newsletter Editor
- Alumni Association President

TEACHERS
- Union representatives

OTHERS

POSITIONS OF NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Opposed to Commercialism in Schools

National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
National Education Association

Opposed to Channel One

American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA)
National School Boards Association (NSBSA)

Opposed to Ad-Bearing Materials and Programs

American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA)
National School Boards Association (NSBA)

SAMPLE SURVEY

Advertising in the Public Schools
SURVEY

1. What questions or concerns do you have about Channel One?

2. What questions or concerns do you have about sponsored educational materials (from corporations and/or industry trade groups)?

3. What questions or concerns do you have about accepting advertising in schools as a way of raising funds for education?

4. What other questions or concerns do you have about commercialization in public schools?

Optional:
Name _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Address _____

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION

(Adopted by the 1990 convention delegates)

COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

WHEREAS: The Objects of the National PTA address the need to protect all children and youth and to meet their educational and other welfare needs and the 1989-90 Legislative Directives of the National PTA on Children's Television Programming support federal legislation and regulations to limit advertising during children's TV viewing hours; and

WHEREAS: The National PTA in Executive Committee (March 1989) suggests that corporations for the same concern for enhancing the education of children as the PTA could serve students better if they would provide technology and high quality programs without demanding direct commercial return on the investment; and

WHEREAS: The National PTA supports private sector/public school relationships and technology which improve the instructional program but oppose any provision which requires children to watch television commercials as a condition of their instruction; and

WHEREAS: The concept of students being required by business to watch commercials or read advertising as a condition of corporate donations to schools has been opposed by the National PTA, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Public Television Stations, the American Association of Secondary School Principals, Action for Children's Television and the National Council for the Social Studies; and

WHEREAS: Sheila Harty stated in Education Leadership, v. 47 no. 4, December 1989-January 1990:

> As a marketplace of ideas, the school should offer a balance and diversity of views, not free access for those who pay entrance...and first with significant access to capital can skew social, economic, or political debate through sustained education or media campaigns;

now therefore be it

Resolved, That the National PTA provide information to its constituent bodies so that they can present informative programs about the dangers to children and the implications of any business exerting so much power to influence the curriculum of the schools of this country and the opinions of so many students; and be it further

Resolved, That the National PTA prepare a mailing to its constituent bodies of relevant information on commercial sector influence in our schools, including the National PTA Executive Committee action adopted in March, 1989, to be sent to its constituent bodies and urge them to give it the widest possible dissemination to local school boards, state legislators, state boards of education and parents; and be it further

Resolved, That the National PTA and its constituent bodies seek and support state and federal legislation and/or regulations that would protect students from exploitation by prohibiting a business from bringing into the school any program that would require students to view advertising or to study specific instructional programs as a condition of the school receiving a donation of money or donation or loan of equipment.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

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PRESS ADVISORY PRESS ADVISORY PRESS ADVISORY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 5, 1995

CONTACTS:
Matti Hannak, Student (412) 694-2988
Robin Templeton, UNPLUG (510) 268-1100

STUDENTS AT DERRY MIDDLE SCHOOL CALL ON SCHOOL BOARD TO UNPLUG CHANNEL ONE

On Monday, June 5th, a group of 10 students from Derry Middle School will testify at the local School Board meeting against Channel One, a 12-minute news program with advertisements which is broadcast daily in every Derry Middle School classroom.

"We don't believe in the commercialization of our education. The contract with Channel One is like selling the kids to corporations," explained Matti Hannak, a Derry Middle School student. "We're asking the School Board to cancel its contract with Channel One and find a non-commercial alternative."

Hannak and a group of Derry Middle School students have been advocating all year for an end to Channel One. They have conducted a survey of the entire student body, finding that 60% of the students want an alternative. They have also published an alternative newspaper to educate the other students.

* * *

WHAT: Students from Derry area Middle School testify at the School Board meeting, calling for an end to Channel One in their classrooms.

WHERE: Derry School District Administrative Building, Derry PA

WHEN: 7:00 PM June 4, 1995

SAMPLE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

SAMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY ON COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING AND OTHER COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS*

The Board of Directors recognizes that commercial advertising, business-sponsored educational materials, and other commercial activity (such as fund-raisers sponsored by businesses) in schools and on school property may be perceived by students and the public as the District's endorsement of the particular product, point of view, or sponsor; commercial advertising and activity has the potential to undercut or be in conflict with District-prescribed curriculum content, or to be controversial; the District should exercise control over commercially related materials in the schools and on school property, in order to assure consistency with its educational goals and the best interests of its students and the community; and the resources available to meet the educational and related needs of District students are inadequate, necessitating that consideration be given to the circumstances in which revenues from advertising will be sought or received, business-sponsored educational materials will be permitted, and other commercial activity such as sponsored fund-raisers will be permitted.

The Board determines that certain advertising, business-sponsored educational materials, and other commercial activity in the schools will promote the education of the District's students, and promote the effective and efficient management and operation of the District, and that such activity should therefore be authorized and, in appropriate cases, encouraged, but only as limited by the following:

A. As to noneducational materials, the Superintendent shall control whether particular advertising or other commercially related activity such as business-sponsored fund-raisers shall be permitted, based upon (1) his or her determination that the best interest of the District and its students will be served and (2) the standards set forth below.

B. As to educational materials containing any form of advertising or donated or provided by a non-District source, Board policy [cross-reference] governing prior review and approval of instructional materials, as well as this Policy, shall govern. Selection and use at the school level of supplemental, non-primary materials that may be outside the scope of Policy ___ shall be governed by this Policy and the considerations set forth in C below.

C. All advertising, business-sponsored educational materials, and other commercial activity permitted shall be strictly in conformance with the following principles:

[Select applicable provisions from documents listed below and any other desired sources]

In cases of disagreement by sponsors with the school or superintendent regarding decisions to deny access, prompt review may be sought by request to the next highest District authority.

DOCUMENTS :

A. MILWAUKEE PRINCIPLES FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS (1990)

B. "THE PRESERVE CLASSROOM INTEGRITY PLEDGE" (THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION , 1996)

C. SOCIETY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN BUSINESS (SOCAP) GUIDELINES (1982)

D. CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE AND GUIDELINES FOR CONTROLLING BUSINESS-SPONSORED EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS USED IN SCHOOLS (INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF CONSUMERS UNIONS, 1989)

* This policy framework for school boards was developed by Michael W. Hoge, Atty. for a presentation at the 1997 Washington School Law Academy in Yakima, Washington, sponsored by the School Law Division of the College of Education, University of Washington.

The paper is entitled, "Drawing the Line on Acceptable Commercial Activities and Advertising: Policy and Legal Parameters Regarding Commercialism Within the Schoolhouse and on School Property, Drafting School Policies on What to Accept and What to Reject, and Possible Lawsuits and Legal Liabilities."

Resources: Books and Articles

Adbusters, a quarterly magazine published by the Foundation for Media Education. Contact at 1243 West 7th Ave., Vancouver, British Columbia, V64 1B7, or call 604-736-9401.

bandele, asha. *A Teachers' Guide to Commercialism in the Classroom.* 1996. UNPLUG: The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education.

Berliner, D.C. & Biddle, B.J. *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools..* 1995. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bobo, Kim, Jackie Kendall and Steve Max. *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s.* 1991. Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press.

Captive Kids: A Report on Commercial Pressures on Kids at School, 1995, Consumers Union Education Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057. Telephone: 914- 378-2507.

Fox, Roy F. *Harvesting Minds: How TV Commercials Control Kids.* 1996. Westport, CN: Praeger.

Jacobson, Michael and Laurie Ann Mazur. *Marketing Madness: A Survival Guide for a Consumer Society..* 1995. Center for the Study of Commercialism. Westview Press.

Kaplan, George R. *Profits R Us: Notes on the Commercialization of America's Schools.* Nov. 1996. Kappan Special Report. Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappan.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools.* 1991. New York: Crown Publishers.

Molnar, Alex. *Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of America's Schools* . 1996. Westview/Harper Collins.

Reich, R. "Big biz cuts class: Firms talk loud, do little for schools." April 21, 1991. *Washington Post*, B1-2.

Savan, Leslie. *The Sponsored Life: Ads, TV, and American Culture.* 1994. Templeton University Press.

Stead, Deborah. Commercialism in the Classroom. Jan. 5 1997. *The New York Times, Education Life.* Section 4A.

Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning. 1994. U.S. Department of Education.

Walsh, David. *Selling Out America's Children.* n.d. Minneapolis: Fairview Press.

Resources: Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education maintains regional offices. Any complaint or concern registered with these offices MUST be forwarded to the Federal Department of Education. We encourage you to phone, write, and request meetings with your regional representatives. Also please encourage your friends, co-workers and students to do the same. Please report your efforts to THE CENTER.

REGION I
(CT, VT, ME, NH, MA, RI)
540 McCormack Courthouse
Boston, MA 02109-4557
phone: 617-223-9317
fax: 617-223-9324

REGION II
(NJ, NY, PR, VI)
26 Federal Plaza, Room 36-120
New York, NY 10278-0195
phone: 212-264-7005
fax: 212-264-4427

REGION III
(DE, VA, DC, WV, MD, PA)
3535 Market Street, Room 16350
Philadelphia, PA 19104
phone: 215-596-1001
fax: 215-596-1094

REGION IV
(FL, AL, SC, GA, TN, KY, MS, NC)
P.O. Box 1777 (30301)
101 Marietta Tower Bldg., Suite 2221
Atlanta, GA 30323
phone: 404-331-2502
fax: 404-331-5382

REGION V
(IL, OH, IN, WI, MI, MN)
401 South State Street, Suite 700A
Chicago, IL 60605-1225
phone: 312-353-5215
fax: 312-353-5147

REGION VI
(AR, TX, LA, NM, OK)
1200 Main Tower Building, Room 2125
Dallas, TX 75202
phone: 214-767-3626
fax: 214-767-3634

REGION VII
(IA, KS, MO, NE)
10220 North Executive Hills Blvd.
9th Floor
Kansas City, MO 64153-1367
phone: 816-891-7972
fax: 816-374-6442

REGION VIII
(CO, WY, MT, ND, SD, UT)
Regional Office, Federal Building
1244 Speer Blvd., Suite 310
Denver, CO 80204-3582
phone: 303-844-3544
fax: 303-844-2524

REGION IX
(AS,HI,AZ,NV,CA,CNMI,GU)
50 United Nations Plaza, Room 205
San Francisco, CA 94102
phone: 415-556-4920
fax: 415-556-7242

REGION X
(AK, ID, OR, WA)
Jackson Federal Building
915 2nd Avenue, Room 3362
Seattle, WA 98174-1099
phone: 206-220-7800
fax: 206-220-7806

Resources: Organizations

COMMERCIALISM IN SCHOOLS

THE CENTER for Commercial-Free Public Education
360 Grand Ave. #385
Oakland, CA 94607
phone: 510-268-1100
fax: 510-268-1277
email: unplug.igc.org

Center for the Study of Commercialism
1875 Connecticut Ave. NW
Suite #300
Washington DC 20009
phone: 202-797-7080
fax: 202-265-4954
email: cspi@cspinet.org

Consumers Union
Education Services
101 Truman Avenue
Yonkers, NY 10703
phone: 914-378-2575

Media Foundation/Adbusters
1243 West 7th Ave.
Vancouver, British Columbia,
V6H1B7 Canada
phone: 604-736-9401
email: adbusters@adbusters.org
www.adbusters.org

National PTA
330 N. Wabash Ave. #2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
phone: 312-670-6782
fax: 312-670-6783
www.pta.org

MEDIA LITERACY

Appalshop
306 Madison St.
Whitesburg, KY 41858
phone: 606-633-0108
email: appalshop@aol.com
www.uky.edu/Projects/Appal/

Center for Media Education
1511 K Street NW, Suite 518
Washington, DC 20005
phone: 202-628-2620
email: cme@cme.org
www.cme.org/cme

Center for Media Literacy
4727 Wilshire Blvd. Suite #403
Los Angeles, CA 90010
phone: 213-931-4177
fax: 213-931-4474
email: cml@earthlink.net
www.medialit.org

Citizens for Media Literacy
34 Wall St. Suite #407
Asheville, NC 28801
phone: 704-255-0182
fax: 704-254-2286
email: wally@main.nc.us

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)
130 West 25th St.
New York, NY 10001
212-633-6700
email: fair@fair.org
www.fair.org/fair

911 Media Arts Center
117 Yale Ave. North
Seattle, WA 98109
phone: 206-682-6552
fax: 206-682-7422
email: www.911media.org

TV Free America
1611 Connecticut Ave. NW
Suite #3A
Washington DC 20009
phone: 202-887-0436
email: tvfa@essential.org
www.essential.org/orgs/tvfa

Note About the Author

Brita Butler-Wall and her husband David are the parents of two children in public school. Dr. Butler-Wall has worked as an educator for 27 years, currently as Visiting Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Seattle University. She has been active in PTA for several years, and now serves as co-chair of the Washington State PTA Advocacy Topic committee on 'Commercialism in Schools' and as an officer of the Seattle Council of PTSAs. She also serves as Co-President of the Seattle Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools, and is a member of the Board of Directors of The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education.

The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education:
Home of the UNPLUG Campaign

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